

**BABEȘ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY  
CLUJ-NAPOCA  
HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY DEPARTMENT**  
Doctoral School of Population Studies and Minorities History

## **PHD THESIS**

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**Romulus Vuia (1887-1963).  
Monographic Contributions**

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**Key words :** romulus vuia, ethnographic park, the ethnographic museum of transylvania, museum collections, ethnography, questionnaires, department of ethnography and folklore

**Romulus Vuia (1887-1963).**

**Monographic contributions**

The present paper aimed as its main objective the study of Romulus Vuia's activity, in

his multiple position as a researcher of the Romanian traditional culture, museum specialist, university professor, founder of academic institutions and disciplines. We have studied the image of the personality and activity of Professor Vuia, underlining that the system implemented by him and the projects he initiated were continued in various stages of development of the Ethnographic Museum of Transylvania. We focused on the biographical journey of Romulus Vuia, which has two dimensions: professional life and private life, with the mention that the latter was constantly covered by a veil of discretion. We managed to reconstruct Vuia's professional career, which represents an essential contribution brought by our thesis. Born in 1887 in Banat, in Comloșul Mare and coming from a family of intellectuals, his father, Iuliu Vuia- interested in historiography, mother-Eugenia Vuia-teacher, Romulus Vuia finished his studies at the Normal School in Budapest and at University of Berlin, where he attended courses held by famous professors, doing internships in museums in these cities. The beginning of his career took place at the Middle and Higher School of Commerce in Hașeg in 1910. Participant in the Great Assembly from Alba Iulia, in 1919 he took the oath of allegiance to King Ferdinand. At the beginning of the Romanian administration, he took over the schools in Hașeg and later received from the Governing Council the task of recovering the artifacts that the Hungarian administration took when he left Transylvania. In 1920 Romulus Vuia became Professor Vâlsan's assistant at the Department of General Geography of the Cluj University. He also graduated from the Faculty of Sciences, obtaining the seventh diploma and later the first Ph.D. in geography at the same university in Cluj. From 1926 he worked as a substitute professor, from 1939 full professor of the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy, at the first Department of Ethnography and Folklore in Romania.

Romulus Vuia was called to participate in the establishment of the Ethnographic Museum of Transylvania, becoming director of this institution in January 1923. In 1929 he managed to establish the National Park. Following the Second Vienna Award, in the autumn of 1940, the University of Cluj took refuge in Sibiu, together with the museum. Upon returning from the refuge, at the end of 1944, the ethnographic park was left with only one museum objective, the house from Vidra, and the museum building in Bărnuțiu Park was in a state of degradation. Gheorghe Pavelescu was asked to resume museum activity because Vuia was forced to retire in 1947. Romulus Vuia left Cluj for Bucharest, where he continued his scientific activity starting with 1955, within the Romanian Academy, then within the Institute of Ethnography and Folklore. He passed away in 1963, in Bucharest.

We followed the scientific path of Romulus Vuia, personality of the Transylvanian elite in the early twentieth century, in the historical and cultural context, in order to highlight

his innovations and major contributions in the world of museum, ethnographic scientific research and academic activity. After the Great Union, Transylvania led by the Governing Council was the one in which various personalities of Romania took over the Hungarian university in Cluj. On February 1 1920, the inauguration ceremony of the University of Cluj took place, the first rector being Sextil Pușcariu. King Ferdinand himself, accompanied by the Royal Family, attended the event. Through this, an "institution of Romanian cultural emancipation in Transylvania" was inaugurated. Along with this, the National Theater, the Romanian Opera in Cluj, the Conservatory, the Orthodox Consistory were established, and later an orthodox cathedral was built. In this cultural landscape, the establishment of a museum that highlights the Romanian ethnic element, was an indisputable necessity.

Once these historical and cultural coordinates were drawn, our exegesis investigated the concept of museum, emphasizing the situation of every Transylvanian institution existing at the time of the Great Union.

In June 16, 1922 Romulus Vuia was proposed to establish immediately in Cluj an ethnographic museum of Transylvania, and in January 1923 Romulus Vuia was declared director of the Ethnographic Museum of Transylvania. Starting from the purchase of private collections and direct purchases from the field, the foundations of the museum's collection were laid. Identifying the spaces for the museum headquarters was a great challenge. From the building on Barițiu Street, where the first Romanian ethnographic exhibition took place, the museum moved to the building in the Mihai Viteazul Square (with the opening in 1928 of the first permanent exhibition), and finally in the building in the Simion Bărnuțiu Park. King Carol II himself participated in the opening of this permanent exhibition on June 13, 1937.

These historical events hid a lot of work in their shadow: from financial problems to the need to establish mechanisms and structures for the museum to function. Vuia was also asked to organize other museums or exhibitions in Sibiu, Târgu-Mureș, Arad, Făgăraș. He worked intensively for the expansion of the museums network in Romania, being involved in legal proceedings in the field of cultural assets - voting and adopting the law of the Ethnographic Museum of Transylvania, the law number 81/12 April 1932.

An important mechanism in the organization of the museum was the foundation of the collections. Acquisitions of ready-made collections were made, various research and acquisition campaigns were carried out, the method of the corresponding members was used and questionnaires were created. The first objective of the questionnaires was to gather information in order to create a consistent database of the museum and to identify the monuments of vernacular architecture. Ion Mușlea also participated in this project between

1926-1928, laying the foundations of the museum's archive. Vuia imposed rigorous operating systems, with an overview and perspective. He managed to put into practice the expertise accumulated in the West starting from the European models that were used and adapted to the Romanian context. He designed collection management systems, file types and registration methods for the new material, ways to preserve artifacts. He had his own projects for the elaboration of exhibition furniture and his own methods of displaying exhibits. Romulus Vuia opted to set up a photo library. He paid attention to photography as an ethnographic testimony.

Since 1929, the museum has managed to expand, by setting up the National Park, near the Hoia forest. The idea was to save the monuments of vernacular architecture and to create one of the most beautiful parks of this kind in Europe. Undoubtedly, however, the Skansen Museum was the essential model. Detailing the information about Skansen and other museums in the Nordic countries, we also presented the models of good practices that formed the basis for the design of the National Park in Cluj. The concept of "garden of the nation", adopted by Vuia, meant that the museum objectives were supposed to be inhabited by peasants. I contacted the research department of the Skansen Museum, from where I received the correspondence that Professor Romulus Vuia had with the director Anders Lindblom and with the administration of that institution. It is an exchange of letters in order to obtain, by the Ethnographic Museum of Transylvania, information related to the organization chart of Skansen and to procure pictures from that museum, necessary for the exhibition „European Parks” from Cluj, in 1936. Moreover, the archive of Skansen Museum kept a series of photographs with the ensemble of folk dancers from Făgăraș, with which Romulus Vuia participated in the Stockholm Folk Dance Festival in 1939.

Our research also found the influences that marked the career of Professor Romulus Vuia. That is why we investigated Professor Vâlsan's contributions and the influence of Emmanuel de Martonne's presence on the Cluj university scene. During the beginnings of the University, 1921-1922, the intellectual effervescence was stimulated by the participation of the university staff who arrived in Cluj for contractual periods. One of them, professor of geography at Sorbonne, Emmanuel de Martonne, was a former doctoral adviser of George Vâlsan and eventually became a friend of the Transylvanian university. With the initiation of a teaching method, de Martonne launched a "style" of field research, through three ethnographic excursions undertaken in three different corners of the country. Romulus Vuia also participated in the teacher's courses, as well as in the ethnographic excursions, mastering in this way a scientific method of work, that of the French regional monographic school.

Romulus Vuia's debut as a university professor took place at the Faculty of Sciences and in 1926, then he had the chance to become a substitute professor at the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy, so that in 1939 he became a full professor. I have presented the topic that Vuia's courses had, of the seminars and the working methods proposed during the seminars. I have analysed the inaugural course of Ethnography and Folklore Department, from 1926, I reviewed a good part of the conferences attended by Professor Vuia on various occasions. He held various conferences in European cities as well as exhibitions of the Ethnographic Museum of Transylvania, especially during the refuge, representing Romania abroad. Professor Vuia's activity within the Ardeleana group, an emblematic cultural event for the University of Cluj in Sibiu, is also related to the same period of the refuge. It represented the symbol of promoting national feelings and acted as a mechanism to support the national spirit, in times of hardship for Transylvanians, Professor Romulus Vuia being a supporter of the revival of traditions.

Along with the professional positions of museum founder, professor and researcher, Romulus Vuia was also the trainer of a new generation of specialists for Transylvanian and Romanian ethnographic science. Thus, at the University of Cluj, famous personalities for the scientific world developed. We analyzed the way in which the careers of personalities such as Teodor Onișor, Ion Chelcea, Lucia Apolzan, Gheorghe Pavelescu, Tiberiu Morariu, Ion Mușlea or Luiza Netoliczka, bore the imprint of training under the guidance of Professor Romulus Vuia, and the direction in which they evolved. Certainly, the Ethnographic Museum of Transylvania, the Romanian Ethnographic Society and the Department of Ethnography and Folklore constituted a laboratory for training new researchers.

A last stage of our research proposed a possible exegesis of the works of Professor Romulus Vuia. This analysis is a personal vision and is, in itself, an exercise. We investigated the major topics that mark Professor Vuia's scientific research, positioning them in the landscape of ethnographic debates of the time. The set of studies carried out by professor Romulus Vuia represents a true ethnographic monograph of the Romanian people and is appreciated by specialists as an exceptional work. As I mentioned in exegesis, even though this work was reunited posthumously into two ethnographic volumes and was not originally conceived as unity, it covers the major spheres of ethnography and was based on the expertise gained through fieldwork, lifelong scientific investigations.

A significant contribution brought by this paper consists in the identification in the written Archive of the Romanian Broadcasting Company of four documents that illustrate the presentation of conferences for the general public. Within this institution, starting with March 3, 1930, the series "Radio University" was inaugurated and the opening conference of Dimitrie

Gusti's, "The Purpose of Romanian Radio", was broadcast. Personalities from among the intellectuals belonging to the interwar period were invited, including Professor Romulus Vuia. Here he presented four papers, one of the themes, Armindenii, unpublished in his work, not previously mentioned or included in any published volume.

Outlining a biographical journey, discovering documents at the Skansen Museum, the proposed exegesis, radio conferences brought to light are unique contributions of the thesis. This monographic attempt wanted to bring together all the existing material at the moment but does not exclude other possible sources and is also the preamble to other scientific approaches to Professor Romulus Vuia such as re-editing works or editing an album of ethnographic photographs. We hope that the material proposed by us will also represent a scientific support for other researchers.